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Leroy Garrett, Editor

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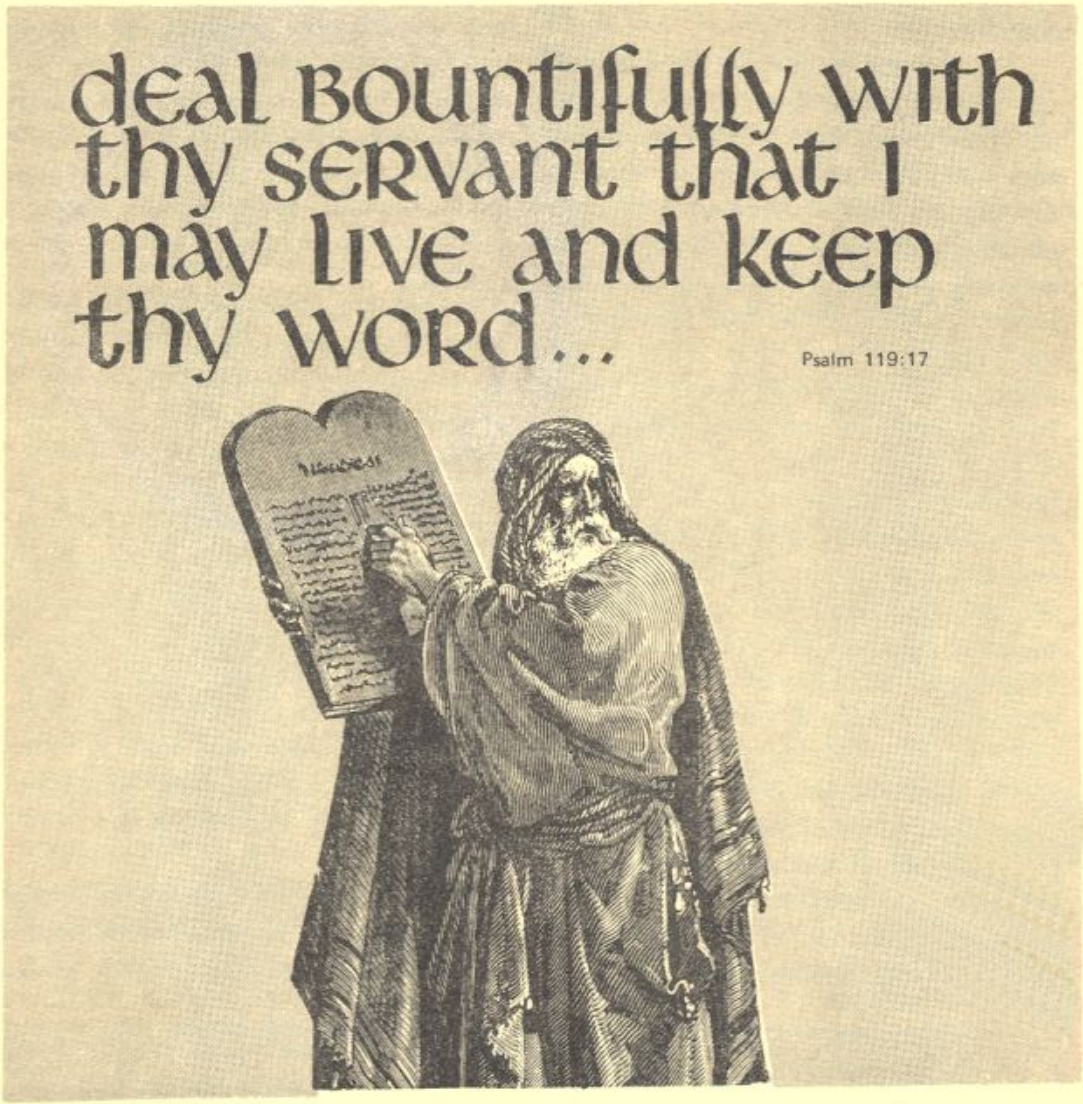

Volume 17, No. 1 **Leroy Garrett, Editor** **January 1975**

The Word Abused . . .

"COME OUT FROM AMONG THEM AND BE SEPARATE"

This is the first of a series on scriptural interpretation that will extend for the next two years, entitled *The Word Abused*. It will eventually be available in book form, under this title and comprising all the issues for 1975 and 1976. There will, of course, be other features, including some in extended series, such as our travel notes and *What Kind of a Book is the Bible?*, which will go well with our overall theme of responsible interpretation of scripture.

The Spirit enjoins the man of God to "handle aright the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15), which is an important way to "Try hard to show yourself worthy of God's approval." There is abundant evidence that many of our teachers do not try very hard to win God's approval in the way they handle the scriptures, and that is what this series is all about. We want to take a look at some of the mishandling. The word is often abused, perhaps out of ignorance, perhaps in defense of some party or sect. Or perhaps simply as a bad habit, with no particular motive. We are less interested in judging the motives than we are in examining the texts and their interpretations. To abuse one's body is wrong; to abuse a child is a grievous sin; to abuse authority is horrendous. But to abuse the scriptures, to twist and warp them for some selfish or sectarian purpose, is a crime against heaven.

The injunction "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God" (1 Pet. 4:11) should be taken most seriously. The flippancy with which some mishandle the Bible may be why we are enjoined "Be not many of you teachers, my brothers, for you know that we teachers will be judged with greater strictness than others" (Jas. 3:1). Mishandlers of the word, beware!

An appropriate illustration of what I mean is the use made of Rev. 18:4 and 2 Cor. 6:17 where believers are urged to *Come out from among them and be separate.* It would be difficult to find a passage in all the world's literature that is so grossly abused and misapplied than this one. It is in fact used in such a way as to convey an idea diametrically opposed to what the word of God actually teaches, as we shall see.

One of our congregations in New York ventured into freedom to the extent that they invited some of the Christian Church folk to one of their gatherings. Then they went to one of theirs. Fellowship was becoming a reality between people that had so much in common, and in a part of the country where they badly needed each other. But all this came to a screeching halt when word came from a supporting church in Texas, citing 2 Cor. 6:1 7. The faithful ones were told to "Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing."

One of our Texas preachers thought he would join the ministerial alliance in his town for reasons that seemed good to him. His elders approved of this behavior and he soon found himself the beneficiary in many ways. But some of his fellow preachers read the riot act to him in the form of Rev. 18:4. "*Come out. . .*" That is what the Lord says, so you have no business *in*, they assured him.

This passage has been wrapped around the necks of our people all these years, and for what? Attending a Billy Graham revival or sitting in on a Keith Miller seminar. Visiting a Baptist Church or joining in a community Easter celebration. Somehow it is hardly ever applied to attending "sectarian" seminary or college or to singing hymns composed by "the denominations" or reading books published by them. We can *read* Barclay or Trueblood, but we can't sit with them in their churches. We can sing *A Mighty Fortress is Our God* in our congregations, but any suggestion of "fellowshipping" the likes of Martin Luther calls down upon our heads the "Come out" passages.

The irony of it all is that we even use these passages on each other. We are to "Come out" from the liberals, the charismatics, and the cooperatives. And we are to suppose that Sunday Schools, instrumental music, individual cups, class literature, and grape juice are among the "unclean things" that we are not to touch. The *them* in "Come out from among them" is made to apply to our own dear brothers and sisters in Christ, perhaps because they are premillennial in their view of the Lord's coming or because their congregation has Herald of

Truth in its budget. This is to use the word of God itself, which is our means of being one people in Christ, to separate brother from brother.

One only needs to look at the context in Rev. 18 and 2 Cor. 6 to see that this is an instance of warping and twisting the scriptures. Rev. 18 begins with a description of Babylon the great. “She has become a dwelling for demons, a haunt of every unclean spirit, for every vile and loathsome bird” verse 2 tells us. Verse 3 informs us that nations of the earth “have drunk deep of the fierce wine of her fornication” and that the kings of the world “have committed fornication with her.” It also says that merchants have grown rich on her bloated wealth. That is the *character* of the evil that the author is talking about, however we may interpret Babylon.

John is talking about the arch enemies of God in these latter chapters of Revelation, whether the anti-Christ or pagan Rome. There is room for differences as to what is precisely referred to, but it is clear enough that in Rev. 18 he is calling for the downfall of an anti-Christian power. He uses such language as “the great whore” and “blasphemous” and “drunk with the blood of God’s people and with the blood of those who had borne testimony to Jesus” in. describing this anti-Christian influence.

The fall of Babylon means the fall of corrupt power and wanton wealth. Kings lament her diminished power while the merchants grieve over her vanished wealth (v. 10). All of this draws heavily from the doom songs against Babylon and Tyre in Isa. 13 and 21 and Ezek. 26 and 27. In reading these chapters one gets a picture of God’s enemies *(not* his children!), of people who are evil, proud, corrupt, and wanton (and *not* people who are innocently mistaken!), and so their fall is the fall of blasphemous arrogance. There are striking parallels between the insidious whore of Babylon in John’s Revelation and corrupt Tyre and Babylon in the Old Testament. Such as: “So great was your sin in your wicked trading that you desecrated your sanctuaries. So I kindled a fire within you and it devoured you” (Ez. 28:18).

It is *this* that Rev. 18:4 summons God's people to come out of. "Come out of *her* . . ." The *her* is the adulterous, corrupting, paganizing influence of all that "Rome" came to stand for to the early Christians, including both her idolatrous altars and her sword stained with the blood of saints. "Come out of her, *my people*. . ." The prophet draws a broad line between the "her" and God's people. She is wanton, cruel, crude, and "a harbor of every vile bird," an arch enemy of God, one made ready for his special judgment. But *my people* are those whose garments had been made white by the blood of the lamb.

These were the ones that God's people were to separate themselves from. One searches in vain for the scripture that tells God's children to separate themselves from other of His children. They were to come out of pagan Rome "lest you take part in her sins and share in her plagues." These were sins of arrogance against God, a calloused disregard toward all that is good, true and holy.

One wonders how sincere brethren ever came to apply such scripture as this to mean that we can have nothing to do with another brother in Christ because he has a piano in his church (or because he doesn't!), or because he has a missionary society (or because he doesn't), or because he is premillennial or whatever. Brethren, consider what you are doing' To take a verse that calls God's children out of pagan, idolatrous, blasphemous Rome and apply it to a brother who loves Jesus like you do and honors him as the Lord is unthinkable. To do such as that comes nearer to the spirit of pagan Rome than does a sincerely mistaken view of baptism or an irregular celebration of the Lord's supper.

2 Cor. 6: I 7 is of the same general context, for it shows the absolute incompatibility of the kingdom of Christ with that of Satan. "Be not unequally yoked with unbelievers" has reference to those who are unrighteous instead of righteous, who serve Satan instead of Jesus, who worship at pagan temples instead of God's altar, and who love darkness rather than light, as the following lines indicate. We can't make a Methodist or a Baptist the "unbeliever" with whom we are not to be yoked.

This passage is often used on the young sister who would dare to marry "outside the church," the young man being a Baptist that we uncharitably, label an *unbeliever.* This is foolish. Someone "not of us" may well be a deeply committed believer, and one of our girls would do well to marry him. Surely that is better than marrying a brute who happens to be in the right church. It is poor logic as well as unloving to

call one an unbeliever who professes with his lips that Jesus is Lord and believes in his heart that God has raised him from the dead.

The apostle is pointing to the radical difference between those who are in Christ and those who are not. Believers *are* to be yoked together, as Philip. 4:3 indicates ("my true yokefellows"), whether in marriage, business, or otherwise. But those are to be avoided, insofar as yokeship is concerned, who frequent pagan temples and offer sacrifices to Belial, lest the believer either become trapped by the system or be led to violate his conscience by such association.

1 Cor. 10:27 makes clear who the unbeliever is: "If an unbeliever invites you to a meal and you care to go, eat whatever is put before you, without raising questions of conscience." Since he is an unbeliever, the meat he serves might well have been offered to an idol. That is all right, Paul is saying, so long as no point is made of it, so don't be asking questions that would put your conscience on trial. So, the unbeliever here is the pagan who goes to heathen temples and offers meat to idols, which he might in turn place on his table when the believer in Christ comes to dine.

Paul erects an impossible gulf between the believer and the unbeliever. There can be no *koinonia* (partnership) between righteousness and iniquity (v. 14), iniquity here meaning lawlessness. Nor can there be any fellowship between light and darkness, for Jesus is the light of the world while darkness is that which some men choose rather than light. And this ultimate antithesis reaches its climax in contrasting Christ with Belial, another name for Satan. Belial is the lawless one, the liar and murderer who rules the powers of darkness out of which the believer is summoned. There is thus no place for the believer as Belial's temple.

Then comes the great exhortation, drawn freely from several Old Covenant scriptures: "Wherefore, Come ye out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be to you a Father, and ye shall be to me sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty."

That is a call to all God's children. It is a summons out of the carnal world, away from a secularistic philosophy, and all the corrupting influences of Satanic power. But it is not a call to believers to separate themselves from other believers. It is not a call for

conservatives to walk out on the liberals or for the inorganic brethren to leave the organic. Or for the "faithful" to come out from the "unfaithful" in the church. There are no such instructions in the Bible. To use this passage in such a way is not only to abuse it, but it is to make it teach the very opposite of what the scriptures consistently insist upon, which is that unity is to be preserved with all diligence in spite of differences.

Divisions in the Body are sinful (period). Gal. 5:20 clearly names factions and parties works of the flesh. In holy wrath the apostle cries out, "Is Christ divided?" (1 Co. 1:13), and he enjoins that we be united and not fractured into sects. Realizing that believers must be one in love to impress the lost world, the Savior himself prayed for the unity of his followers.

There is therefore no excuse for fracturing the Body. Not even error or wrongdoing. The church at Sardis was far from being faithful in all respects. Indeed, the Spirit called upon them to repent. But even though they were so far gone as to be "dead," the faithful among them were not told to "Come out and be ye separate." He rather said to them, "Yet you have a few persons in Sardis who have not polluted their clothing. They shall walk with me in white." You can still be "white" in a church that has gone black! The "Come out" command is always to believers to leave the corruption of the world, and it is never to part of the Body to leave the rest of the Body.

This is not to say that there is never justifiable reasons for some in a congregation to leave and start a new work. But it certainly means that they are not to do so with any reference to these passages. God certainly is not telling them to "Come out" from their own brethren.

It is a crime against heaven, not unlike the arrogance of Tyre, to take that portion of God's word that draws a dark line between the church and the world and use it to drive a wedge between brothers in Christ. We rather follow the Spirit when we urge forbearance, which calls for no compromise of truth. And *forbearance* implies that there are differences and difficulties in Body ministry, otherwise there would be nothing to forbear.

It is an important lesson for us to learn. "Come out from among them and be separate" is a call to the Body to be pure of worldly defilements, while "Give diligence to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" is a call to the Body to safeguard its essential oneness.—*the Editor*

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IS AUGUST 17, 1889
THE BIRTHDAY OF THE CHURCH OF CHRIST?

It is difficult to give a precise date for the beginning of any religious group, but I suggest that August 17, 1889 can be defended as the genesis of what we call "the Church of Christ." Some of the old timers among us can recall a half century or more of our history, and 1906 is generally recognized as the year that the U. S. Census listed us as separate from the Christian Church or Disciples. But the Census people were only recognizing what had been evolving for upwards of a generation.

In naming 1889 as the year we began, I am fully aware that this may prove offensive to those who like to carve "Founded A. D. 33" on the cornerstones of our buildings, or list such a date on a tract as the time of our origin. But who can really take such a claim seriously? Where was the "Church of Christ" when Luther nailed his thesis to the door of that cathedral in 1517? And where was it when the preaching of Peter the Hermit fired the First Crusade in 1095, or when Emperor Marion called 500 bishops to the Council of Cha1cedon in 451?

We are told that "we" were then lost in the wilderness, and that Alex Campbell and Barton Stone "restored" the true church around 1809. But this is only another way of saying that the "Church of Christ" did not exist before the 19th century. To assert that our birthday is really on Pentecost in 33 A. D. is to beg the question that we are indeed the true church and no one else is. That the Body of Christ, the congregation of the New Covenant scriptures, began on Pentecost in 30 or 33 A. D. is a generally accepted fact of history. But for anyone religious society today to claim to be precisely *that* church is a risky pretension, to say the least. If all the other communions, whether Presbyterian, Mormon, or Roman Catholic, began since that glorious Pentecost, it is likely that the "Church of Christ"—and the "Church of God"—also began sometime since then.

Besides, it is not true that Stone and Campbell were out to "restore the true church," as if it did not already exist. Their intention was to restore *to* the church (that already existed) things they believed lacking. They were reformers, desiring to change conditions that were amiss. They understood that the Body of Christ has always existed,

just as Jesus promised that it would, but that it always needs reforming —even as it did in the first century!

So in tracing our own history, the "Church of Christ" as we now know it with those unique features that make it distinctive, we certainly cannot go any further back than the 19th century. It all depends on *when* in the 1800's, and I'll explain why I say 1889.

In common with other of our historians, I would date the beginning of the Stone-Campbell Movement as 1801, the year of the Cane Ridge Revival. The writing of the *Last Will and Testament* (1804) and the *Declaration and Address* (1809) are other dates of importance in identifying our Movement's beginning. And it was at the outset intended to be only a Movement, a movement "to unite the Christians in all the sects." No one then intended to start still another sect or denomination, certainly not Stone or Campbell. Their idea was to work within the existing churches, for there the true Body of Christ was present amidst all the sectism, and thus to help complete the task of reformation that began with Luther. The first congregations under Stone attempted to work within the Presbyterian framework, and Campbell's first church (Brush Run) joined two different Baptist associations.

But none of this worked. They soon found themselves on the "outside," and so they evolved into a society of their own. By 1850 they were upwards of one-half million strong, calling themselves "Christians" and "Disciples," but hardly ever "Church of Christ." And at this time they were quite different from what we now call the "Church of Christ." The main difference is that they were not exclusivists nor sectarians, for they generally practiced the rule laid down by Campbell that nothing is to be made a test of fellowship but what is clearly set forth in the scriptures, and they readily conceded that they were not the only Christians, though they did take pride in being Christians only.

An orthodox "Church of Christ" member of the 1970's would have been uncomfortable in the Disciple congregations of the 1850's. He would have as fellow-members oodles of Baptists that came into the Movement without being reimmersed. He would sorely miss the claim that "We are the only true church," for they were not of that persuasion. He might even be asked to attend the annual gathering of the Christian Missionary Society that began in 1849 with Alex Campbell as president. And as he moved amongst the

congregations he might not see a single sign reading “Church of Christ.” He would also miss such teaching as “the five items of worship” and other peculiar “Church of Christ” doctrine. Nor was there then the demand for conformity as there is now among us. They had widely divergent views on many points of doctrine, including baptism. Thomas Campbell was an avowed Calvinist and Barton Stone had unorthodox views on the preexistence of Christ. But their broader view of fellowship kept them one people.

Campbell’s view of a sect was “a religious system that makes opinions tests of fellowship.” This concept prevailed for the first six or seven decades of the Movement, for they simply did not make opinions and private interpretations tests of fellowship. By 1850 some churches supported societies, others did not; some had the instrument, others did not; some “the minister,” others did not. Still they did not split. Even the pressures of the Civil War did not fracture them. So, we can hardly see the “Church of Christ” in 1850.

In the generation following the Civil War a different spirit began to emerge. Some leaders lost their perspective of “preserving the unity of the Spirit” and began to insist upon conformity of doctrine as the basis of oneness. Forbearance of differences gave way to strict adherence to “party” leadership. And we say *party,* for by the 1880’s certain leaders were ready to divide the Movement in order to have their way about doctrine.

It all came to a head in Sand Creek, Illinois on August 17, 1889 at a gathering of thousands of “conservative” brethren who were protesting against what they called *the innovations.* They composed a document called *An Address and Declaration,* which was a reversal in spirit as well as in title, from Thomas Campbell’s *Declaration and Address,* which is rightly adjudged a great contribution to unity. The “Address” part of the document, composed by Peter P. Warren at Sand Creek, was a denouncement of such innovations as societies, choirs, and “the one man imported preacher-pastor,” Curiously enough, the instrument was not mentioned, though surely included in “other objectionable and unauthorized things.”

Such protests were not new. The organ had been debated for 20 years. Such stalwarts as McGarvey and Franklin were opposed to the organ, but both insisted that it should not be made a test of fellowship. Franklin had suggested that anti-organ folk might meet

separately for conscience sake, if need be, but that they should not withdraw fellowship from each other.

It was the "Declaration" part of the document that was new, for it was a formal withdrawal from all those who practiced the innovations. It did not mince words: "after being admonished, and having sufficient time for reflection, if they do not turn away from such abominations, that we cannot and will not regard them as brethren."

This cruel act of division was sanctioned by Daniel Sommer, editor of *American Christian Review,* in the north, and by David Lipscomb, editor of *Gospel Advocate*, in the south, and so the "Church of Christ" became a separate communion. This set the stage for the separate listing in 1906 in the U. S. Census. It was in that same year that the "Church of Christ" and the "Christian Church" went to court over the property in Sand Creek, Illinois which has been followed by seven decades of hate, debate and divisiveness.

It is ironic that the same Movement could produce two documents so different in spirit as the *Declaration and Address* and the *An Address and Declaration.* The first called for a unity in diversity, recognizing that God's children can be one in Christ and yet have differing opinions and interpretations. The latter insisted upon a conformity of doctrine, without which there can be no brotherhood. When Sommer and Lipscomb endorsed a policy of "we can not and will not recognize them as brethren" because of differences in opinion, they raped the Restoration principle, and they started a practice that has further divided the "Church of Christ" every decade since then.

Lipscomb, a man devoted to the principle of unity, refused to go along with such a divisive scheme when it was tried ten years before. Had he continued to refuse, choosing the attitude of "co-existence" advocated by Franklin and McGarvey, the "Church of Christ" might never have happened, for it required Lipscomb's southern leadership.

So, let's face the truth about our origin. Our founders: Peter Warren, Daniel Sommer and David Lipscomb. The place: Sand Creek, Illinois. The time: August 17, 1889. And the document that sealed our origin:

An Address and Declaration, surely one of the most vindictive and sectarian documents in the history of religion.

What can we do about this once we are mature enough to face the facts? Repudiate our illegitimate beginning, disclaim the spirit of *An Address and Declaration*, and courageously adhere to the freedom of the *Declaration and Address* that acknowledges that wherever God has a son we have a brother, despite his erroneous opinions.

Then we can join hands with all concerned believers throughout the Christian world in making the community of God upon earth what it ought to be. This is the Restoration ideal and this is the spirit that originally motivated us. If a tragic day derailed us, let a bright day of love and hope get us back on the right track.—*the Editor*

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Notes from Travels in Europe . . .

"RECONCILED DIVERSITY" IN GENEVA

This series, extended over several issues, will be drawn from my journey to Europe in December of 1974. The purpose was to attend a conference of the secretaries of the World Confessional Families, an organization of substantial ecumenical interests. These people have been engaging in bilateral dialogues at national, international, and world levels, and they were meeting to evaluate these conversations. The bilaterals have matched the Lutherans with the Orthodox, the Old Catholic with the Roman Catholic, the Congregational with the Presbyterian, and the Disciples with the Roman Catholic, to name but a few. Some of the questions discussed are the meaning of Sola Scriptura (the Word alone) for today, the nature and communication of grace, role of the church, authority, mixed marriages, the ministry, and baptism. Interestingly enough, the Roman Catholics have been most active in these conversations, conducting dialogues with most everyone.

I was in Geneva at the invitation of the World Convention of Churches of Christ, which has been involved in the WCF for years, but mostly in the person of Disciples. This year they wanted someone from both the "direct support" folk (Independent Christian Church) and the "anti organ" groups, so they invited Prof. Robert Fife of Milligan College and me. This reflects an effort on the part of the WCCC to include all of the Restoration persuasions in its concerns. Disciples present in Geneva were W. B. Blakemore, dean of Disciples Divinity House, University of Chicago and president of the WCCC; Allan Lee,

general secretary of WCCC, which now has its headquarters in Dallas; and Paul Crow, president of the Disciples' Council on Christian Unity.

But my trip included more than Geneva. Since European journeys are few and far between for me, I thought this might be my last chance to visit "Campbell country" in Scotland and Ireland. So on my return trip I scheduled Glasgow and Edinburgh in Scotland and Balleymena, Market Hill, Richhill, and Ahorey in North Ireland, all related to the Campbells in one way or another. This meant contact with a lot of interesting people, whether missionaries in Scotland, the pastor of the old Ahorey church (where Thomas Campbell ministered), or the rank and file I met on land, sea and air. And the Lord, as he always does, provided surprises for me along the way, and his abundant mercies attended me amidst the difficulties that every persistent traveler has.

So I shall be telling my story, not only this one about Geneva, but in succeeding installments under such titles as "Our Roots in Scotland," "A Grim Night in North Ireland" (this one will sober you!), and "My Pilgrimage to Ahorey." If you'll go along with us, we'll try to make it interesting and informative.

There were about 35 participants in the Geneva conference. These included bishops, archbishops, metropolitans, canons, and protopresbyters among the high clergy of several churches, along with theologians, professors, and agency secretaries. Churches represented ranged all the way from Orthodox (Russian and Greek) and Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Methodist to the Disciples, Mennonite, Seventh Day Adventist and the Salvation Army. Our chairman was Bishop John Howe of the Church of England. When I told him that I had read about him in the American press as the probable choice for the next Archbishop of Canterbury, he modestly insisted that I must not believe the American press.

In both ecclesiastical and ecumenical terms I was impressed with the calibre of representation. From the Vatican was the secretary for promoting Christian unity; the Archbishop of Canterbury sent his foreign affairs secretary; the Moscow Patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church was on hand; the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople was present. Represented also was the World Council of Churches, the Institute for Ecumenical Research, the Anglican Consultative Council, the Lutheran World Federation, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, and the Friends World Committee for Consultation. And, the closest thing to us, the World Convention of Churches of Christ.

I was impressed that men of this calibre would take several days from their busy lives to carry on serious discussion about Christian unity. I admire pioneers, and this is what these bilateral efforts have been, pioneering ventures into Christian unity. Quite independent of the World Council of Churches (and viewed by some as competitive to the Council), these World Confessional Families have dared to take ecumenical concerns beyond the sacrosanct confines of high brow ecclesiastical chambers to the regional, national, and international levels for bilateral conversations. The bilaterals have not been

exactly “grassroots,” but they are in that direction. When I suggested to Prof. Nils Ehrenstrom, a world authority in ecumenicity, that my own experience led me to believe that the Holy Spirit does more with us in terms of creating oneness when we gather at the grassroots level, he explained that some of the bilateral conversations had included the rank and file believers. But he defended the work of the WCF on the grounds that research is important, which reaches beyond the capacity of the rank and file. And it must be granted that a large depository of research material is available in our quest for unity through such agencies as Faith and Order and the Institute of Ecumenical Research.

These people make it evident that they mean business when they speak of “a fellowship which draws its life from the promise and gift of the Holy Spirit, gathering together the people of God. It is a fellowship nourished by the written word of God. It flows from the one baptism. It is vivified by the Eucharist, the heart of Christian communion.” And they can hardly be faulted for saying: “A fundamental insight of the ecumenical movement is an acceptance of one another not only as individuals but also in our different traditions and confessions. Here too we need prayer to give us the humility and spiritual realism to acknowledge the extent to which we need each other in apprehending and proclaiming the inexhaustible mystery of Christ.” And cannot we all see a need for such a spirit as: “It is only by learning and sharing beyond our own boundaries, and by accepting correction from each other, that we can grow into the fulness of the truth of Christ.”

They laid down a new dimension to the nature of dialogue: “Dialogue implies listening together which evokes a modification of personal conviction and confession. No partner in dialogue can escape this.” This means that those in dialogue realize that they have something to learn from each other. By its very nature it tends to modify personal conviction, for each participant is brought into “a new mutual awareness of truth which in turn qualifies and gives new dimensions to initial starting points.” Such an idea would be threatening to a lot of our people, but we are hardly ready for real dialogue until we realize that we have a great deal to learn from others, as well as some truths to share that we may understand better than others.

I was most impressed with their ideas on reconciliation, which they centered in the work of God through Christ and applied to the imperative of unity. “Such an understanding of reconciliation in Christ commits all of us to the task of thinking through, confessing and living out together our common understanding of Christ and His Gospel. The churches are therefore summoned to witness to Christ together at every level of man’s life—culturally, socially, ethically—in the context of the realities of today.”

It is in this context that they talk about *reconciled diversity.* a concept that surely gets close to describing unity in the scriptures. They observe that unity can never be a matter of uniformity of theology or culture, for to insist upon a uniform pattern is to deny the multiplicity of the gifts of the Spirit and the manifold variety of creation and history. Reconciled diversity acknowledges that the things which unite are greater than those that separate. That we are going to be different from each other is evident enough. It is a question of whether we are willing to yield to the Spirit in such a way that the differences that we have allowed to separate us will give way to reconciliation—reconciled diversity.

That their view of unity is essentially Christian and not simply humanitarian is evident in this statement: "We are agreed in the conviction that the unity of the Church is given primarily in the life and work, death and resurrection, of our Lord Jesus Christ, and that the gift of unity in Christ cannot be had unless it is appropriated by our sharing in His dying and rising and by our realization of the common life in the Body of Christ."

Denominational heritages themselves are legitimate, say the WCFs, insofar as the one faith explicates itself in history in a variety of expressions. They concede that denominational heritages have sometimes preserved errors, but when the existing differences lose their divisive character a vision of unity emerges which has the character of reconciled diversity. So, they avow, unity and fellowship among the churches do not require uniformity of faith and order, but can and must encompass a plurality or diversity of convictions and traditions. Loyalty to a particular church background and ecumenical commitment are no contradiction, they add.

They had considerable discussion over the nature of *unity* and *union*, some seeing them as synonymous, others as having an important distinction. Unity is general and union is specific, or the first is qualitative and the latter quantitative. Unity is that conciliar oneness that exists when people see themselves as children of God and accept each other as brothers. Union is when they are able to activate this in some common expression.

Some of my own impressions, noted in my diary as we proceeded, would probably impress no one. I felt that, despite their claims to the contrary, their idea of unity was closely tied to organic forms. The bilaterals are of little value if they do not move toward a union of churches. My own view is that unity is more personal and individual than that. Even in a maze of theological differences and varied ecclesiastical forms people can be one in Jesus in that they reach out and accept each other as such - in spite of the theologians!

Too, they left the impression that the differences must somehow be worked out, which is the task for the theologians, while I would say that differences of some description will always be with us and that the Spirit's unity can be realized in spite of them. This is where their term "reconciled diversity" has special meaning. Surely all the issues do not have to be settled before unity and fellowship can be appreciated.

My prejudices force me to add that I doubt if the clergy, high or low, can really do a great deal toward Christian unity. The clergy may have divided the church, but I question its ability to heal. There is an ecumenical movement going on that many of these people are not in a position to realize. It takes the form of their own people in prayer groups, cottage meetings and the like, along with that great spiritual surge that is cutting across all sectarian lines. Such ones care little for all the theological gobbledegook that concerns some ecumenists. But Jesus they know, and for his sake they reach out to claim all as brothers that God acknowledges as children. It doesn't take a lot of theological savvy to do that.

So mine is a rather simple view. Amidst all the talk in Geneva I kept saying to myself, "Is it really all this difficult?" But at the same time I rejoice that these discussions take place, for surely the Spirit can and does work at many levels in realizing God's eventual purpose for all His children. Yet I am convinced that any findings on the part of the clergy will have to filter down to the rank and file for implementation if it proves to be of any value. Unity is every believer's business.

Bob Fife and I got out on the town just a little. We saw the likes of the new United Nations building and the Ecumenical Center which houses the World Council of Churches. And we moved somewhat among the Genevans, visiting a chapel where John Knox once pastored and the cathedral where John Calvin held forth. In recalling Calvin's theocracy in Geneva we had something less than the ideal standard for the unity our conference sought. But in mid-city we listened to youth as they sang and preached about Jesus on a downtown corner. The joy in their faces and the urgency of those who

lifted up the Christ is indelibly fixed in my mind, and I am left thinking that what they were doing is both the way to unity and the purpose of unity. All of which was quite apart from theology and theologians, and who knows, they may hardly have heard of the World Council or the World Confessional Families.—*the Editor*

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What Kind of a Book is the Bible? . . .

IS THE BIBLE TO BE TAKEN LITERALLY?

If you were unfolding a letter from a loved one, you would no doubt think it strange for someone to say to you, "Are you going to take it literally?" You would probably say, at least to yourself, *I am going to take the letter for what it says, the way I always take letters.* The question as to whether you take letters literally would seem inappropriate.

So it is with the scriptures. They too are love letters. It is not a matter of taking them either literally or figuratively, but as letters from God, the way we would take any letter. The question as to whether we take the Bible literally or figuratively implies that it is unique literature, distinctly different from all other writings, and is therefore to be approached differently. This is an injurious fallacy.

The scriptures are for the most part the writings of ordinary people like ourselves, and they grew out of everyday situations, just like our notebooks, diaries, letters, and newspapers. There is no special "Holy Ghost language," and we owe much to Adolf Deissmann, the German scholar, who discovered that the New Covenant scriptures were written in the common (koine) Greek of the time, the same kind of writing that he found in papyri for every century since Christ, which took the form of everything from a soldier's letter to a housewife's favorite soup recipe.

Surely we believe that the scriptures are of God, which makes them very different from all other writings. But God gave us the Bible through earthen vessels, and it is remarkable how those vessels were like the rest of us. The scriptures "happened" in a manner very similar

to our own writings. A believing physician, for instance, wanted to send an account of "the story" to a Greek friend of his, a person of substantial influence. He probably had access to the gospel according to Mark, but this did not quite satisfy his purpose. Nor did numerous other accounts that he had at hand. So he researched the story for himself, "as one who has gone over the whole course of these events in detail" and thus gave us *Luke-Acts.* There is no indication that the Spirit revealed anything to the doctor, though we can believe that he did *inspire* him, or superintended his work, so that he would come up with the facts that God wanted him to have.

This is all so human, normal and natural. This would be much the same as any man today who would draw up a narrative of his own or somebody else's life and send it along to a friend. And it would be rather foolish to ask the friend, "Are you going to take it literally or figuratively?" The question is simply meaningless in such a context. Since the scriptures are the same kind of literature, it is also meaningless in reference to them.

Paul wrote *Philemon* only when a runaway slave came into the picture. It is a letter, such as you or I would write, about that slave and his master. Since Paul knew them both, he wrote the letter. He wrote the Thessalonian correspondence only when Timothy brought him news as to how things were going in Thessalonica. And we can suppose that he would never have written *1 Corinthians* if the Corinthians had not sent him a letter with a lot of questions.

This is why it is complete folly to contend that all these writings are *the gospel.* They are the apostolic teaching (didache), but hardly the gospel; for the gospel was already a reality and had been preached for almost a generation before any of these letters were written. If these letters had never been written, the gospel would still be no less the gospel, for the gospel is that Jesus is the Messiah and through him we have remission of sins. Those glorious facts created the church, and in due time, amidst all sorts of vicissitudes, the church (the apostles in particular, but others as well) produced the scriptures.

Since those scriptures grew out of the problems of the daily life of the church, and were couched in the language of the common folk, it is my contention that they should be read and interpreted like any other ordinary literature. There was what we now call *classical* Greek back in those days, such as the writings of Plato, but the scriptures were not written at that level. Until Deissmann did his work in the papyri manuscripts, discovering that the New Covenant scriptures were in "man of the street" language, it was presumed even by scholars that the scriptures were of some special Holy Ghost lingo.

It may not be quite right to say that the Bible does not, therefore, need to be interpreted. But we can say that there is no reason to interpret it any differently than we do other literature.

We get all entangled in the art of hermeneutics, which is the science of interpretation. Like all science it can become overly systematized and even irrelevant. And terribly boring! If one needs hermeneutical rules in interpreting a love letter from his wife, then maybe he needs such in interpreting the love letters from God. It is my personal conviction that we have made too much of hermeneutics, just as we have of commentaries. We do not have to run to rules and other books in understanding the Bible, certainly not as much as we think we do.

There are only two important questions to ask as we take the Bible in hand. *What does it say?* The question of its form and rendition is in the field of textual criticism and translation, which would include form criticism. Most of us are satisfied that in our various translations we do indeed have the true word of God, so we can leave textual and form criticism with the scholars who have given their lives to such work. Having a good English translation before us, we can determine what is *said* by a careful reading and rereading. When Newton was asked how he had learned so much about science, he said, "By applying my mind to it." Any person with ordinary intelligence can determine what the Bible says by applying his mind to it. Just as he can and does understand the newspaper or a letter from his son.

The other question is *What does it mean?* This is of course interpretation, and this is obviously more difficult, in some cases at least. Even Peter complained that Paul wrote stuff that was hard to understand. We can determine well enough what the apostle is *saying,* except in those few instances where there is a textual problem, but deciding' what he *means* is sometimes most difficult.

But to say that it is difficult is not to say that it is impossible. The scriptures *can* be understood. Even after a lifetime of study there will be truths yet to be discovered and depths yet to be reached. This is because the source is God. But we can nonetheless gain a substantial understanding of what the Bible is saying and what it means to us in our daily lives. Paul was writing to ordinary folk when he said: "I have already written a brief account of this, and by reading it you may perceive that I understand the secret of Christ" (Eph. 3:3). *I have written. You can perceive.* That is encouraging.

Far more important than a book of hermeneutics at your side is a heart that longs for God and a mind that is dedicated to the understanding of His word. If we would, like the psalmist, pray "Open thou mine eyes that I may see the wonders of thy word," it would do more than any commentary would do. And there is the indication that the Spirit will help us in our study: "I pray that your inward eyes may be illumined, so that you may know what is the hope to which he calls you, what the wealth and glory of the share he offers you among his people in their heritage, and how vast the resources of his power open to us who trust in him." (Eph. 1:18)

That very passage illustrates our point. If we believe that God is speaking to us in these words, then we can pray, as Paul did who wrote it, that the Spirit will enlighten our inner eyes so that we may understand. By applying heart as well as mind the truth will be ours. Let the commentaries wait while we peruse the entire epistle to see just how these words fit with the whole. And if we are praying for guidance in understanding then we make ourselves completely transparent before God, hiding nothing and wanting nothing except truth itself. Surely if we are led by the Spirit in our study, we have laid aside the party line. If our intention is to impose our own views upon the word, then we may as well forget the whole thing.

Is the Bible to be taken literally? or figuratively? There is no point to such questions. It is to be taken for what it says and means, like any other literature. When I tell my Ouida that she is really the cat's meow, she doesn't have to run for a textbook on hermeneutics or make a study of literary symbolism in order to understand what I am saying. Of course the Bible uses figures and symbols like all other literature, but all this is plain enough if we approach its pages with a little common sense. That after all is the one grand hermeneutical rule, if we must have hermeneutics - *common sense!*

Take our Lord's words in Lk. 14, for instance. "When you are having a party for lunch or supper, do not invite your friends, your brothers or other relations, or your rich neighbors; they will only ask you back again and so you will be repaid. But when you give a party, ask the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. And so find happiness. For they have no means of repaying you; but you will be repaid on the day when good men rise from the dead."

What this *says* is simple enough. A child could learn it and retell it with but little study. But what does it *mean?* Common sense tells us that this would have only rare application if it applied just to the parties we give. And he was surely talking about the whole of life, not just party stuff. How would this apply to one of our sisters living alone in a high rise in an urban center? It would simply be impossible for her to arrange a dinner to which she'd invite the maimed and the blind off the streets. It would hardly be any easier for the rest of us, and what good would it do if we did manage such a thing now and again?

But Jesus is surely saying something very significant about doing the will of God on earth. Each of us is to pray, as we study this, that our lives will be full of parties for the unloved and neglected. God will lead us in different directions in fulfilling this. A teacher might be doing this when he puts an arm around the youngster that is having trouble getting with it. You might be doing this when you write a letter to an airline, commending a hard-working stewardess. Once when I

did this, the airline president wrote back, assuring me that his little girl would hear of it. If you are impressed with the window dressing at the store alongside the bus stop, you will almost certainly add sunshine to someone's life if you take the trouble to step inside and say so. These may be little parties that do not exactly change the world, but they are life and that is what Jesus is talking about. I always remember that letter I wrote to a dedicated teacher that took such an interest in our Philip just after he arrived from Germany and was having trouble adjusting. She told a colleague that it was the only letter of appreciation that she had ever received in twenty-five years of teaching. Shortly after that she died of cancer. I did what I understand Jesus to be saying. I had a party (went to a little trouble) for someone because of love and appreciation, not for what they might do for me in return. The whole of our lives is to be lived this way, *for others.*

Jesus says this is the way to be happy. In serving those that others ignore we are most like our Lord. We may not be repaid in this world, if that concerns us, but Jesus assures us that we'll be rewarded in the next.

This is common sense interpretation of scripture, coupled with prayer, dedication and application. And it is not so much a matter of taking this or that passage literally or otherwise, but of taking it for what it means.—*the Editor*

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OFFICE NOTES

If you have not read Johannes Verkuyl of the Free University in Amsterdam, we suggest you try his *The Message of Liberation in Our Age* for only 2.45 in paperback. He describes a freedom that has imperatives and calls upon the church to make structural changes in both clergy and laity.

The editor of the *Expository Times*, C. Leslie Mitton, is a most resourceful man, and you would profit from his *Jesus: The Fact Behind the Faith,* which considers Jesus in history.

You can now get Keith Miller's *The Taste of New Wine* (610,000 copies so far) for only 1.25. It is ideal to hand to a friend who is growing spiritually.

A Theology of the New Testament by George Eldon Ladd is a comprehensive and scholarly introduction to the theology of the New Testament that we recommend highly. At 12.50 it may appear high, but its nearly 700 pages provide exciting information on biblical theology that would ordinarily come in several volumes. I have been reading it with great profit, for it gives vital background information on every thing from John the Baptist and the Kingdom of God to the Primitive Church and the Sources of Paul's Thought. The bibliography is simply remarkable and the approach is conservative and evangelical. It is a study in-depth by a careful scholar who writes lucidly and interestingly. I suggest this book at a higher price than four or five other cheaper ones that are not likely to offer as much.

A close study of it will give you as substantial a background in the New Testament as most college or seminary courses would.

One of our own men, John S. May, has prepared a worthwhile commentary on the entire New Testament entitled *Am I Not Free?* In the introduction he names R. C. Bell and R. H. Boll as having great influence upon his studies. This is a "down home" kind of commentary that is worth the reading. 229 pages, hardbound, only 5.95.

We can send you Francis Schaeffer's *The God Who Is There* for only 2.50. It shows how truth based on revealed religion has something to say to our secularistic, existential world.

We urge upon you four books by John R. W. Stott: *Christ the Controversialist,* a book that can be read again, and again, 2.50; *The Baptism Fulness of the Holy Spirit,* which considers the subject practically as well as scriptural and really speaks to the issues, 1.00; *Basic Introduction to the New Testament,* which deals with the message of the New Testament, 2.50; *What Christ Thinks of the Church* tunes in on the letters to the seven churches, one of my favorite little volumes, 1.50. You'd do well to read them all.

We have only a few copies of *The Fool of God* (paperback, good type) for 3.00. There may one day be a reprint of this, but we advise you to pick up one of these if you have not read Louie Cochran's historical novel of Alex Campbell.

You can hardly do better in a one-volume commentary on the entire Bible than the one by Matthew Henry and Thomas Scott. Due to a special purchase we can offer this at only 5.95. Hard cover with over 1,000 pages. It is both devotional and scholarly; ideal for family reading, which is the way Campbell used it (Scott's, that is).

Your Restoration library is incomplete without *Hazard of the Die,* the exciting story of Tolbert Fanning and his role in the Restoration Movement, by James R. Wilburn. 4.95.

Back issues of this journal are available at 20 cents each or six for 1.00, including postage. Why not order a fistful to hand to those who might be helped by them? Our last bound volume, including all 400 pages for 1971-72, is available at 4.50. The next bound volume, 1973-74, will be ready this spring. You should reserve your copy, but you need send no money now.

Will you help us double our readership in 1975? The responses to our efforts have never been more positive and encouraging than lately. Many seem to believe that we are saying things that are vital, and that they are being said reasonably, clearly and lovingly. If this is true, we should have far more readers than we have. But this depends largely upon those of you who now receive the paper. All of you have friends and relatives who could be added to our number. There are *many* in the churches who would be encouraged by what we are saying, if they were but introduced. Here is one thing that all of you can do.

The price makes this possible. We will mail the journal for the entire year to all names you send us at only 1.00 per name, with a minimum of five names, no maximum. This is a modest request. Will you help us?

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READERS' EXCHANGE

I would like to express my appreciation for what you are writing has meant to me since I began to read *Restoration Review*. I just wish I had encountered you and a few other brothers many years ago. It is a shame that one who is brought up in the C. of C. and attended a couple of church schools could be spiritually blind for so many years. It is a double indictment of myself and my supposed teachers.—*Name Withheld (teacher at a Church of Christ college)*

Occasionally we come to think that ours is the only group that has had a struggle. Things are happening all over. Just recently some fine families from the Christian Church came to us, swelling our number to almost 100. They are from an "instrumental church," but that is no barrier between us.—*Hank Allan, Church of Christ, 919 Laurent Ave., Caruthersville, Missouri 63830.*

God be thanked for your Christ-like attitude concerning instrumental music. We must learn to apply the principle of Rom. 14 (and context) to all the unwritten creeds that some of our churches impose upon Christians. I confess I do find application most difficult. How does a minister speak and act so as to extend "fellowship" to those with whom he differs on "issues," and yet not unduly disturb those who would "blow a fuse" at the thought of accepting those with whom they differ? Perhaps the answer is in the grace of God. —*Mike Brashears, Rice Avenue Church of Christ, 6033 S. Rice Ave., Bellaire, Texas 77401* (Mike describes himself as "non-class, not anti"!).

The theme for the next two years is one that will fill a great need. Would you deal with 1 Cor. 14:34-35 and I Tim. 2:11-1 2 as soon as feasible? I had a mixed Wednesday evening class studying and practicing prayer, with several of our ladies participating so beautifully. Then someone started beating us over the head with these passages. So we are back to the traditional practice. I hope and pray that we can resume the more spiritually enriching sharing in prayers soon. Some of your perceptive insights can be helpful. - *Claude Counselman, 760 W. J. St., Benicia, Ca. 94510.*

(I do not plan to deal with these passages in the series on *The Word Abused,* but a piece will soon appear on "Women and Body Ministry" which may be helpful.—*Ed.*)

Your evaluation of Lemmon's speech indicates that you classify *Mission* on the left. I would be delighted to see it cease publication. Where and with whom do you therefore classify me?—*J. D. Bales, Searcy, Ar.72143*

(I answered this good and dear man, whom I greatly respect, that I classify him as my brother beloved, and that I have no interest in seeing him in any other light. And I believe he considers me his brother, one that he loves, however far right or left I may be. Our brother will probably get his wishes about *Mission* and all the rest of our publications, for they will all end. "When that which is perfect is come, *Mission* and *Restoration Review* will be done away." Possibly even before! J.D. only needs to be patient.—*Ed.*)

Please note that "McGarvey on Romans 14:3" as represented on page 371 of Vol. 16, No. 9 was actually written some three years after McGarvey died according to a note on p. 372 of the commentary on Romans quoted. Whatever may be true on the matter, I doubt that brother McGarvey considered instrumental music as a matter of indifference, unless he did change his mind after death.—*Howard McClellan,* 613 S. *E. 33rd St., Edmond, OK. 73034*

(We thank Howard for this correction. We believe it can be documented, however, that brother Pendleton, who wrote the last few pages following McGarvey's death, correctly represented his views. He was non-instrumental in that he personally could not use it or endorse it, but he was not anti-instrument in that he did not make it a test of fellowship or a condition for unity. Brother McGarvey always continued in the fellowship with instrumentalists, as he did with Philip Pendleton, who finished his commentary for him. Brother McGarvey's position is our position.—*the Editor)*

I was raised in a most traditional Church of Christ setting, but I am no longer tied to the traditions. We have a new congregation in Ithaca and we are not shackled by tradition. We also are not worried about what our sister congregations think. Your article on autonomy was most helpful in putting this into perspective.—*D. R. Price, 119 Salem Dr., Ithaca, NY 14850*

Your article, "The Woman I Cannot Forget," was greatly appreciated. The simple reason: I am a Funeral Director. The experience you had in California is indeed legion. In the heart of every caring mortician lies the memory of many "forgotten people." Speaking as only one from my profession, I thank you for calling this pathetic situation to the attention of your readers.—*Rex Tilly, Gatesville Funeral Home, Gatesville, TX 76528*

Harry Fox, Sr., a great irenic Christian, passed today. Blessed in the sight of the Lord! - *Harold Thomas, Los Angeles, Ca.*

How readily we editors assume that we have the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth; and how glibly we use the party jargon to please our constituencies! Or does the Lord perhaps read our papers and wonder about our definitions? - *Edwin V. Hayden, Christian Standard, Cincinnati, Ohio.*

Thanks for publishing *Restoration Review.* I cannot express in words how much looking honestly at the Church of Christ has meant to me. I felt and knew there was something wrong with our thinking but I could not express it. You are putting into words what has been in my heart and mind. Best wishes to you as you continue to make us think and see things from other perspectives that have a truly spiritual ring of truth to them. My prayer will continue to be that the Lord blesses you with wisdom and guidance of the Holy Spirit, that His purposes may be accomplished through you and others. ~ *Pete Ragur, 3020 67th, Lubbock, Tx.* 79413.

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